

# Los Angeles Times

Friday, February 18, 1994

## CHILDREN'S THEATER

### Lewis' Tale Opens Up a Heroic Quest

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In Narnia, fauns and centaurs roam, a witch is defeated and a majestic lion helps four children fulfill their heroic destiny. . . You can't beat C.S. Lewis' "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," with its epic themes of death and redemption and good vs. evil, for a tale well told.

Theatreworks/USA's hourlong musical version of the classic, now touring Southland venues—it plays Saturday at the Lobero Theatre in Santa Barbara and Feb. 27 at the Norris Theatre in Palos Verdes—is far from epic, but even this bare-bones, economy-sized show manages to convey some of the inspirational magic that has captivated young readers for decades.

Condensed to a scant one hour by playwright Jules Tasca and given a sparse setting—James D. Sandefur's set consists of a large wardrobe flanked by painted banners that are changed as the action shifts—this World War II-era adventure only skims the highlights.

Susan (Alison Franck), Peter (Andrew Pudvah), Lucy (Pamela Maclean) and Edmond (Mike Stutz), sent to stay at a country estate to escape the bombing of London, discover a doorway to a different world at the back of an old wardrobe.

Edmond is bewitched by the wicked White Witch (a rather shrill Franck) who has given Narnia a perpetual winter (without Christmas). The other children are led to the great Aslan (Tim Gadzinski), a regal lion who tells them of the Narnian prophecy that two sons of Adam and two daughters of Eve (four human children) will defeat the Witch and become the kings and queens of Narnia.

If the mini-musical, directed by John Henry Davis, didn't dig deeper at this point, the show would be nothing but a superficial good time, punctuated by a crisp, high caliber score by composer Thomas Tierney and lyricist Ted Drachman.

Instead, the audience is given children as heroes in the struggle against evil and is challenged to identify with each child's discovery of unsuspected resources of courage and dignity.

The "bloody conflict"—John Edmond Morgan choreographed the swordplay and fight scenes—and Aslan's sacrificial death (and his resurrection) are not gory or overly dramatized, but they aren't sugarcoated either.

The five adult actors change roles by changing headgear crafted to represent various animals and other characters, although it was difficult to make out details at a recent performance while seated toward the back of the large La Mirada Theatre. Caryn Neman is credited with the costume design.

■ "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," Lobero Theatre, 33 E. Canon Perdido Drive, Santa Barbara on Saturday at 2 and 5 p.m., \$6.50-\$9.50, (805) 963-0761; and Norris Theatre for the Performing Arts, Crossfield Drive and Indian Peak Road, Palos Verdes on Feb. 27 at 1 and 4 p.m., \$12, (310) 544-0403.